

REMARKS

The claims previously in the case have been replaced by a set of new claims that are believed to be proper as to form and patentable over the cited references.

Reconsideration is accordingly respectfully requested, for the rejection of the claims as anticipated by or unpatentable over WO 93/10486.

The applied reference discloses a watch case (1) with abutment elements (i.e., lugs) (2). A watch strap detachably connects to the case via a connecting bar (4) comprising two pins (6) movably arranged within a sleeve (5) of the connecting bar (4). The pins and sleeve are designed so that the pins cannot be completely extracted from the sleeve (5) nor completely withdrawn inside the sleeve (5). An opening (7) in each lug (2) accommodates a respective end of the connecting bar (4) - and more specifically, a pin (6) - so that the connecting bar (4) is insertable between the lugs (2). The lower part of the lugs are provided with bevelled introduction surfaces (15) that, as the watch strap is being inserted between the lugs (2), progressively push the pins (6) into sleeve (5) until the pins can release into openings (7) within the lugs (2).

Arranged within lugs (2), the watch includes a release device with actuating elements (9) that act on the pins (6) against a spring force. The actuating elements have a head (10) with a peg (11), and they are arranged movably on the extended

longitudinal axis of the connecting bar (4) of the strap. Within the lugs, a seat (12) is provided, the seat having a through-hole (13) that extends inward towards the opening (7). The peg (11) extends into the through-hole (13).

WO 93/10486 discloses two different embodiments for the manner in which the actuating elements (9) act on pins (6). In the first embodiment (Figs 1 and 2), a compression spring (8) is arranged within the sleeve (5) of the connecting bar (4) between the pins (6). The compression spring (8) acts to propel the pins outward of the sleeve so that, when the watch strap is attached, the ends of the pin are pushed into openings (7) of lugs (2) and abut against plungers (14) provided at the end of the actuating element pegs (11). When the actuating element heads (10) are pressed, the plungers (14) push the ends of pins (6) out of openings (7) thereby releasing the watch strap.

In the second embodiment (Figs 3 and 4), the seat (12) has a chamber (16) in which a compression spring surrounds the peg (11), biasing the actuating element (9) outwardly. The end of each peg (11) has a gripper (18) for gripping the end of the corresponding pin (6), thereby pulling the pins (6) into openings (7) of lugs (2) when the watch strap is attached. The gripper may have a concave groove and the end region of the pin may be formed as a flange-spring that corresponds to that groove. Again, when the actuating element heads (10) are pressed, the grippers (18) push the ends of pins (6) out of openings (7) thereby releasing

the watch strap (perhaps after the exertion of a slight force by the user).

As set out in the specification (paragraphs 2 and 3 of the specification), a drawback of prior art interchangeable watch strap systems that can be removed without a tool is that there is a risk of the connection between the strap and the watch case becoming undone and thus the watch being dropped (and thus possibly damaged or lost). The present invention overcomes this drawback of tool-free interchangeable watch strap systems, by simultaneously requiring a user to (a) press the push buttons of the mechanism and (b) orientate the strap in a particular orientation (the "advantageous orientation") in order to fasten a watch strap to or remove a watch strap from the watch case. As noted in paragraph 23 of the specification, by requiring these simultaneous actions, a double safety level is achieved and the risk of the watch case and watch strap being unintentionally disconnected is greatly minimized.

Specifically, in applicant's claimed invention, the protrusions formed on the internal faces of the lugs cooperate with annular housings formed on the lateral faces of the hinge pin, to ensure that a watch strap can only be fitted or removed when the strap is in the advantageous orientation with respect to the hinge pin.

In comparison, the applied reference does not disclose or suggest any additional safety connection mechanism requiring that the watch strap be placed in a particular orientation with respect to the watch case in order to effect fastening or removal of the strap. In particular, the lugs (2) of WO 93/10486 do not have any protrusions formed on their internal surfaces. Similarly, there are no housings of annular (or any other) shape formed on the lateral surfaces of the watch strap in WO 93/10486. WO 93/10486 only describes pins (6) and actuating elements (9, 11) that are moveable within the sleeve of the watch strap and within the openings of the lugs. These are similar to the pivots and endstones described and claimed in the present invention, but, despite the Examiner's assertions, in no way can the pins (6) and actuating elements (9, 11) of WO 93/10486 be considered protrusions or housings formed on the surfaces of the lugs or watch strap.

Hence, WO 93/10486 does not disclose or suggest any additional safety connection mechanism requiring the watch strap to be placed in a particular orientation with respect to the watch case in order to fasten or remove the strap. As a result, if the actuating elements (9) in WO 93/10486 are pushed in (see Fig. 3 of that document), the pins (6) in sleeve (5) would disengage from openings (7), and the strap could be disconnected from the watch case (either immediately or perhaps after the exertion of a small force by the user) regardless of the angle or

orientation between the watch strap and the watch case. There is thus a risk of the connection between the strap and the watch case becoming unintentionally undone and thus the watch being dropped and damaged, or lost.

While WO 93/10486 does disclose using bevelled introduction surfaces (15) that act to progressively push the pins (6) into the sleeve (5) as the watch strap is being inserted between the lugs of the watch case, this is simply to facilitate connection of the bracelet and does not depend on the orientation of the watch strap. Furthermore, the use of bevelled introduction surfaces to push the pins into the sleeve may be awkward for a user. In contrast, preferred embodiments of the present invention simply require that the easily-accessible push buttons be depressed in order for the pivots to retract inside the hinge pin. This much simpler mechanism for retracting the pivots into the hinge pin when fastening a watch strap is much better suited for combination with the additional safety connection procedure of having to place the strap in the advantageous orientation with respect to the hinge pin in order to fasten or remove it.

Thus, in sum, it is clear that WO 93/10486 does not teach or suggest that the hinge pin (1) comprises on its lateral faces an annular housing (25) having a groove (26) defining an advantageous orientation, this annular housing (25) being intended to cooperate with a protrusion (27) located on the internal faces of the lugs (15), such that, for a user to fasten

or remove the watch strap from the watch case, the buttons must be pushed and simultaneously the strap must be in said advantageous orientation with respect to the hinge pin, as set out in the new claims.

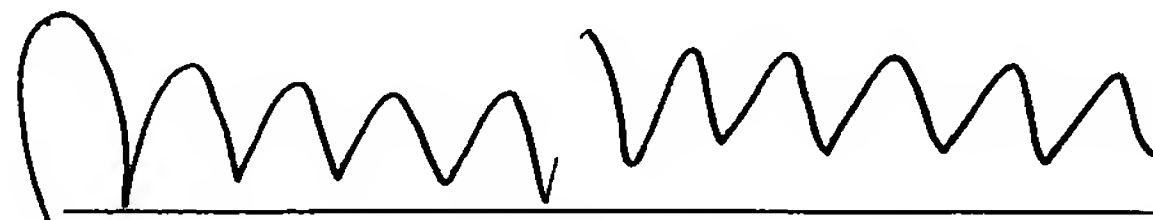
Similarly, it is also clear that WO 93/10486 does not teach or suggest that each lug (15) comprises, on its internal face, a protrusion (27), the protrusion being insertable within an annular housing formed on a lateral surface of the hinge pin when the fastening element is in an advantageous orientation with respect to the hinge pin, as set out in new claim 14.

As the new claims clearly bring out these distinctions with ample particularity, it is believed that they are all patentable, and reconsideration and allowance is respectfully requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 25-0120 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. § 1.16 or under 37 C.F.R. § 1.17.

Respectfully submitted,

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